

THE PLACE OF FREEDOM
IN NICOLAS MALEBRANCHE'S
DOCTRINE OF OCCASIONALISM

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INTRODUCTION

It was in 1664, the year he was ordained at the Congrégation de l'Oratoire, that Nicolas Malebranche discovered René Descartes' posthumous Traité de l'Homme in a bookshop on the Rue Saint-Jacques. The effect of the encounter, according to Fontenelle, was dramatic.

Il acheta le livre, le lut avec empressement, et, ce qu'on aura peut-être peine à croire, avec un tel transport qu'il lui en prenait des battements de coeur qui l'obligeaient quelquefois d'interrompre sa lecture. (1)

But it was on the mind of Malebranche that the book had greater and more lasting effect. Indeed, Descartes was to become one of two major influences on the formation of Malebranche's thought.

The other was Saint Augustine, the great thinker championed by the Oratory since it was established by Pierre de Bérulle (later Cardinal) in 1611.

It was this combination of Cartesian method and Platonic-Augustinian inspiration that was to become a marked characteristic of Malebranche's philosophy. Like the Oratorian Fathers who taught him, Malebranche saw no contradiction between questions of theology and the new science and mathematics. The two were compatible and the Cartesian method was the means of achieving this unity.

This characteristic of Malebranche is seen clearly in

his celebrated doctrine of Occasionalism, which was first put forward in De la Recherche de la Vérité (2) of 1674-5. To the philosopher it is essentially a doctrine of causality, maintaining that all created objects, including humans, are causally impotent, and merely provide the "occasions" for God, the only true cause, to act.

Such a doctrine immediately raises important philosophical questions, particularly as to the role played by humans within an Occasionalist Universe. It is the task of this thesis to consider one of these questions - Is Occasionalism compatible with human free-will?

If humans are causally impotent, then they cannot be considered the cause of their actions or even choices. They are reduced to puppets, and puppets have no freedom if everything they do is caused by a higher authority.

But the doctrine is not only of interest to the philosopher, for it raises questions important to the theologian as well. If we are not free to cause our actions, then we cannot be held morally responsible for them. And without this freedom there is no question of moral reprehensibility, for as Malebranche himself writes:

Si nous n' avions point de liberté, il n'y auroit ni peines, ni récompenses futures; car sans liberté il n'y a ni bonnes ni mauvaises actions: De sorte que la Religion seroit une illusion & un phantôme. (3)

Good and bad actions do occur, however. So does sin. But we cannot be held responsible for our sins if we are

not the causes of them, so where does responsibility lie? Occasionalism upholds God as the only true cause, but to suggest that God is responsible for sin is to enter onto very dangerous theological ground indeed.

The doctrine of Occasionalism is characteristic of Malebranche. He was neither a philosopher nor a theologian alone, but a highly original thinker whose mind addressed itself to the problems of both, in an attempt to construct a world-view in which such problems are resolved. The doctrine of Occasionalism is a fundamental part of this construction.

The first half of this thesis will consider Occasionalism - its history, its treatment by Malebranche and some of the problems it involves.

The second half will then turn to the question of human freedom, in order to determine what place, if any, is left to it within an Occasionalist framework. It will begin with Malebranche's own conception of free-will, the problems that arise from it, and examine whether the freedom it grants us is sufficient for us to be held responsible for our actions. It will conclude with the question - Is any notion of human freedom possible within Occasionalism?

PART ONE - OCCASIONALISM

CHAPTER ONE

Occasionalism before Malebranche

Mais les causes *naturelles* ne sont point de véritables causes: ce ne sont que des causes *occasionnelles*, qui n' agissent que par la force & l' efficace de la volonté de Dieu. (1)

The doctrine of Occasionalism was not, as is often maintained, a "deus ex machina" device constructed by the Cartesians to solve the problem of mind/body interaction. The doctrine, with its correspondence of states between mind and body controlled directly by God, certainly provided an ingenious solution to this problem, but this was merely a consequence of the doctrine, and not its aim.

Nor was Occasionalism an original doctrine in the Seventeenth Century. Daniel Whitby, a prominent English thinker, dismissed it in 1697 for being "but an invention of yesterday, spick and span new Philosophy, not discovered till this last Age", (2) therefore lacking the endorsement of time and undoubtedly suspect.

In fact, Occasionalism predates the Cartesians by around seven centuries, taking form in the work of the Islamic theologians, or "Mutakillims" of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries, and their attempts to harmonise Aristotel-

ian philosophy with traditional Koranic dogma.

It was the Eleventh Century mystic al-Ghazālī who became the champion of the new doctrine, taking it beyond a mere theological affirmation of Allah's omnipotence, and formulating a critical analysis of causation with striking similarities to the work of the later Cartesian Occasionalists like Malebranche.

Understandably, not everyone accepted the Occasionalist conclusions. The greatest opponent of al-Ghazālī and his fellow Asharītes was the last, and probably greatest of Aristotle's Muslim disciples, Ibn Rushd, or Averroës. In his most famous work Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence), he attacks al-Ghazālī's notions of causality and attempts to rehabilitate causal power to the natural plane.

By the end of the Twelfth Century Occasionalism was already a well established and well argued doctrine in Islamic thought. By the Thirteenth Century this began to spread into Medieval Europe, particularly with the translation into Latin of fifteen of Averroës' thirty-eight commentaries.

The real credit for transmitting the ideas of the Islamic Occasionalists to the Latin West, however, belongs to the famous Thirteenth Century Jewish philosopher and theologian Musa. ben Maimūn, or Maimonides. His work Dalālat al-Ha'rīn (Guide for the Perplexed), and its attempts to reconcile Mosaic teaching with Aristotelianism, had a profound influence on the emerging school of Latin Aristotel-

ianism, of which Saint Thomas Aquinas was to be the champion. It was Aquinas who provided Occasionalism with its link to the Christian West.

Cartesian Occasionalism

With the exception of Nicolas d'Autrécourt, Occasionalism made very little progress in the Christian world during the Middle Ages. It was not until it was taken up by the Cartesians that it reached the level of influence it had enjoyed in Islamic teaching.

René Descartes was not an "Occasionalist", although he came very close of Occasionalism on a number of counts, particularly over questions of God's omnipotence. For example, in his letter to Princess Elisabeth of 6 October 1645, he writes:

Car on ne saurait démontrer qu'il existe, qu'en le considérant comme un être souverainement parfait; et il ne serait pas souverainement parfait, s'il pouvait arriver quelque chose dans le monde, qui ne vînt pas entièrement de lui...mais Dieu est tellement la cause universelle de tout, qu'il en est en même façon la cause totale; et ainsi rien ne peut arriver sans sa volonté. (3)

The efficacy of secondary causes is also called into serious question by the Cartesian notion of "continuous creation", which Descartes outlines in Méditations, III.

En effet c'est une chose bien claire et bien évidente...qu'une substance pour être conservée dans tous les moments qu'elle dure, a besoin du même pouvoir, et de la même action, qui serait nécessaire pour la produire et la créer tout de nouveau, si elle n'était point encore. En sorte que la lumière naturelle nous fait voir clairement, que la conservation et la création ne diffèrent qu'au regard de notre façon de penser, *et non point en effet.* (4)

This was a notion that Malebranche himself embraced, so we will study its consequences in greater detail later. Briefly, it involves the view that the continuing existence or conservation of an object is but its continuous re-creation, and that the same power that created it "ex nihilo" is required to maintain its conservation. Only God has the power to create from nothing, so only God has the power continuously to create, or conserve the object. And since to create an object at any given moment is to create it in such and such a state (at rest, in motion and so on), it is God who is the direct and constant cause not only of the object itself, but of all its determinate states as well.

Consequently, the role and causal efficacy of secondary causes is placed in serious doubt. My arm moves, not because I cause it to in any way, but because God re-creates

my arm in a different position at each successive moment.

Several Cartesians before Malebranche followed Descartes' lines of reasoning to Occasionalist conclusions. Geraud de Cordemoy, in the Fourth Discourse of his Discernement du Corps et de l'Ame (1666), considers the question of what it is to cause motion in a body. He begins with two definitions.

(1) Causer le mouvement des corps, ne signifie autre chose, que mouvoir les corps.

(2) Avoir du mouvement, ne signifie autre chose qu'être mû. (5)

He then proposes five axioms.

(1) On n'a pas de soy, ce qu'on peut perdre, sans cesser d'être ce qu'on est.

(2) Tout corps pourroit perdre de son mouvement, jusqu'à n'en avoir plus, sans cesser d'être corps.

(3) On ne peut concevoir que deux sortes de substances, sçavoir *l'Esprit* (ou ce qui pense) & *le Corps*. C'est pourquoy on les doit considerer comme les causes de tout ce qui arrive; & ce qui ne peut venir de l'une, se doit necessairement attribuer à l'autre.

(4) *Mouvoir*, ou causer le mouvement, est une action.

(5) Une action ne peut être continuée,
que par l'agent, qui l'a commencée. (6)

From the first two he concludes that motion is not an essence of a body - "Nul corps n'a le mouvement de soy-même".

(7) Thus the cause of motion in a body is something external to it. This, however, cannot be another body, for if it were, that body would have motion of itself. Therefore, the prime mover, by applying the third axiom, must be a mind.

Finally, by applying the fourth and fifth axioms, he concludes that "Ce ne peut être que le même Esprit, qui a commencé à mouvoir les Corps, qui continué de les mouvoir".

(8) This mind, however, cannot be one of our finite minds for several reasons. Firstly, actions occur, even in our own bodies, which we do not will. Secondly, many actions do not occur that we nevertheless do will.

Mais un vieillard a beau vouloir marcher
vite, un yvrogne a beau vouloir marcher
droit. (9)

Moreover, argues Cordemoy, if a finite mind had the power to commence motion, then the quantity of motion in the Universe would depend on the whim and volitions of that mind and would constantly change, thereby upsetting the simplicity of God's creation.

The prime mover, then, must be an infinite mind, and the only infinite mind is God's. Thus, when two balls collide, the first does not cause the second to move.

Rather, "leur rencontre est une occasion à l'esprit, qui a

mû les premiers, de mouvoir les seconds". (10)

By considering the dualism of mind and body, Cordemoy extended this conclusion onto a psychological plane as well. Since mind and body are entirely disparate, having no common attributes, neither can be supposed to produce effects in the other.

But if there is no interaction between mind and body, then why is it that a change in one almost always involves a change in the other? For example, when I will to raise my arm, my volition is followed by the desired movement. Is not my volition the cause of the movement? Cordemoy's reply is no.

Tout ce qui est clair, c'est que l'esprit
veut que le corps soit mû en un sens, &
que ce corps en même temps est mû d'un
mouvement conforme au desir de cet esprit.
(11)

Our volitions do not cause the movements, but rather:

nôtre volonté soit une occasion à la
puissance qui meut déjà un corps, d'en
diriger le mouvement vers un certain côté
répondant à cette pensée. (12)

Our volitions are "occasional causes", providing the occasion for God, the only true cause, to create certain motions.

In the same year that Cordemoy's book was published, another Cartesian, Louis de la Forge, followed a similar

reasoning in his work Traité de l'Esprit de l'Homme. By considering the complete dissimilarity of mind and body maintained by Cartesian dualism, La Forge is led to ponder how the two can be united.

Two bodies are united when their solid parts are so firmly pressed together as to produce one continuous thing.

Or tout de mesme que deux Corps sont vnīs,
lors qu'ils sont aussi proches qu'ils
peuent estre pour agir & pâtir dépendemment
l'un de l'autre. (13)

Likewise, two minds can be said to be united by love when their thoughts and desires are directed toward each other.

Et comme deux Esprits sont en parfaite
vnion lors qu'ils s'aiment tellement,
qu'ils viennent à ne vouloir plus rien,
& à n'auoir plus aucune pensée que l'un
pour l'amour de l'autre. (14)

But neither of these unions pertains to the relationship of mind and body: not by a fusion of solid parts, since mind has no solid parts, nor by love, since the body is a machine, devoid of emotion and thought.

Nevertheless, when I desire to raise my arm the arm moves, so clearly some relationship exists between my mind and my body. What form does this relationship take?

La Forge's conclusion is that between mind and body there is merely a correlation of states, and not a causal relationship, i.e. a change in the modifications of one

coincides with a change in the modifications of the other, without actually "causing" them. The true cause is God, for only a wise and powerful being could correlate perfectly the two states.

Mind and body, then, do not cause changes in each other, for only God can do this. Rather, an event in one acts as a "cause particulière" that leads God, the "cause universelle" to produce the appropriate effect.

This is also true of the relationship between bodies. God is the prime mover, the first cause of motion. Nevertheless, bodies are particular causes of different movements "en déterminant & obligeant la cause première à appliquer sa force & sa vertu motrice sur des Corps sur qui il ne l'auroit pas exercée sans eux". (15)

Another Cartesian and contemporary of both Cordemoy and La Forge was the Belgian philosopher Arnold Geulincx. He arrived at an Occasionalist conclusion by reasoning from the premise that a true causal agent must know not only that it acts, but also how it acts. Thus, a material object cannot be the true cause of any effect in either a material or spiritual being, since it lacks consciousness and therefore cannot know that it acts or how it acts. Likewise, a spiritual thing, such as my mind, cannot be a true cause since although I know that effects are produced, I do not know how they are produced. Therefore, to be the true cause of motion in my arm, it is necessary for me to know the entire physiological process involved. Naturally, only an omniscient being has such knowledge, namely God.

This argument, based on the highly questionable premise "Ego non facio id quod quomodo fiat nescio, (I do not make (i.e. cause) what I do not know how to make (cause))", (16) is one that Malebranche himself was to employ, so it will be considered in more detail later.

Geulincx's conclusion is that God, the only omnipotent and omniscient being, is the only real cause. The body and the soul are like two clocks, "neither of which acts on the other but which keep perfect time because God constantly synchronizes their movements". (17) In this way, a desire in my mind is followed by a bodily movement because God correlates the two states thus, not because of any causal relationship.

By the time Malebranche began formulating his own philosophy, Occasionalism was certainly not a new doctrine. In fact, Malebranche was to support a world-view already widely held by many of his contemporaries, and one that could trace its roots back seven centuries to the Muslim world of Baghdad.

CHAPTER TWO

MALEBRANCHE'S OCCASIONALISM

Introduction

Malebranche's own Occasionalism, which was first put forward in the Recherche, and reiterated in the subsequent works, borrowed many elements from his Cartesian peers such as Cordemoy and La Forge. The two greatest influences on the formation of his philosophy, however, were Saint Augustine and René Descartes. From the former came the inspiration, the same vindication of the absolute omnipotence of God and the dependence of creatures that had motivated the Islamic Mutakallims seven centuries before.

From Descartes came the method to be employed - the tools of reasoning by "clear and distinct ideas", and the ontological framework of substance and modification within which this reasoning was to take place. In the two great thinkers Malebranche found both the means and the end of his enquiry. As Victor Delbos writes in his Étude de la Philosophie de Malebranche:

La force du sentiment religieux qui pousse ainsi Malebranche à concentrer en Dieu toute causalité et toute puissance est soutenue encore par le besoin de satisfaire à la règle cartésienne de la clarté et de la distinction des idées. (1)

Malebranche's Occasionalism

The first step in Malebranche's Occasionalism is an attack on the efficacy of secondary causes, which he considered to be the logical consequence of adhering strictly to the Cartesian rule of reasoning only by clear and distinct ideas, within a framework of substance and modification, an ontology that Malebranche himself accepts without question.

To understand the reasoning, it is, therefore, necessary to understand the Cartesian ontology, which maintains that everything in the created realm is either a being or a mode of being, i.e. either a substance or a modification, which is merely "l'être même d'une telle façon". (2)

From this, seven principles arise, which Daisie Radner identifies in her work Malebranche.

(1) A modification cannot subsist without some substance.

(2) A modification can only be a modification of one substance.

(3) One cannot conceive a modification without conceiving the substance of which it is the modification.

(4) A modification cannot be where its substance is not.

(5) A modification cannot pass from one substance to another.

(6) Only that which gives being can give modes of being.

(7) A modification cannot have more extent than its substance. (3)

With this in mind, Malebranche follows Cordemoy in considering the question of what it is to cause motion.

Matter

If we consider the simple example of a ball (Ball A) travelling across a plane and coming into collision with a second ball at rest (Ball B), what can we say occurs in this collision?

Experience suggests to us that, when Ball A collides with Ball B, it "causes" the motion in the latter, or communicates its own motion to Ball B, causing it to move. Experience, however, warns Malebranche, is deceptive.

Renonce, Mon fils, à tes préjugés, & ne juge jamais à l'égard des effets naturels, qu'une chose soit l'effet d'une autre, à cause que l'expérience t'apprend qu'elle ne manque jamais de la suivre. (4)

When we reconsider what we see, we have to admit that all we witness in the collision is that Ball A stops moving and Ball B starts to move, or as Charles McCracken writes:

we would judge that the impact of one body on another is temporally antecedent to the inception or change of motion in the

second body; but even our eyes would not tell us that the first event *caused* the second. (5)

Experience does not tell us what causes the motion in Ball B, only that it occurs; and since it is mute on the subject we must consult our reason, which tells us many things.

Firstly, a body cannot move itself, for it has only a passive capability of receiving figure and motion. Ball B does not move itself.

Secondly, the same force is required to keep a body in motion as to move it in the first place, and since a body cannot move itself, it follows that it cannot have a force to keep itself moving.

It is illogical, therefore, to suggest that Ball A somehow communicates a moving force to Ball B, when it has no such force to communicate. Moreover, even if it did have this force, it would be a modification of Ball A, and modifications can only be the modifications of one substance. They cannot, therefore, be communicated.

From this, five conclusions can be drawn.

- (1) A body cannot move itself.
- (2) A body cannot keep itself in motion.
- (3) A body cannot move another body.

Therefore (4) Motion in a body is caused by something other than a body.

And since there are only bodies and minds in the Cartesian framework, then:

- (5) The cause of motion in bodies must be a mind.

This reasoning is very similar to that followed by Cordemoy in the Discernement, and it continues to reach the same Occasionalist conclusion.

Since modifications cannot be communicated, the only way of causing a modification in a body is by creating it. Moreover, only that which creates being can create modes of being, and since only God can create being, only He can create its modes.

It is God alone, then, who can cause motion in a body. In the collision it is God who is the cause of the motion in Ball B, just as he is the cause of motion in Ball A. The collision is merely the "occasion" for God to produce a particular effect.

The interaction of matter is where Occasionalism functions at its most simple. When we consider the relationships of bodies and minds, and minds with other minds, things get decidedly more complex.

Mind and Matter

In the formulation of his philosophy, Malebranche borrowed many elements from René Descartes. One of these is the notion that there are only two kinds of substance, mental and material, or "mind" and "matter".

Like Cordemoy and La Forge, Malebranche addresses himself to the problems that such a dualism involves for questions of causality. How do two things as entirely disparate as mind and matter act on each other?

Descartes' own solution was to posit an interaction made possible by the "union" of mind and body in the pineal gland. This union, he admits in a letter to Princess Elisabeth, he is not able to explain, but it is something "que chacun éprouve toujours en soi-même sans philosopher", (June 28, 1643) (6).

This did not satisfy Malebranche. In Entretiens sur la Métaphysique he attacks Descartes' lack of exactness.

Ce mot *union*, est un des plus équivoques qu'il y ait. (7)

It does not lead us any closer to an understanding of their interaction. Minds cannot have motions and bodies cannot have thoughts, so even if they are in a sense "united", they cannot share the same sorts of modifications. Consequently, they fail to meet Descartes' own necessary condition for causal interaction, "resemblance", i.e. that anything which acts as a cause must contain in itself what it imparts.

quia si concedatur aliquid esse in effectu,
quod non fuerit in causâ, concedendum etiam
est hoc aliquid a nihilo factum esse. (8)

(For if we allow that there is something in the effect that was not in the cause, we must admit also that this something has been

created from nothing.)

Malebranche's solution to mind/body interaction was to reverse Descartes' approach to the problem. Instead of trying to find a theory of causation that fitted into the Cartesian ontology, he formulated a construction that this ontology itself fitted into. This construction was Occasionalism.

Malebranche's approach to mind and body follows that for matter. The problem is the same - how can any substance interact with another?

If I consider the example of my desiring to raise my arm, and my arm subsequently moving, then what can I say about the relationship between desire and motion? Experience shows that my desire is immediately followed by the desired action, and suggests that my volition is the cause of the motion. But on reflection, all it really shows is "that the movements of our body follow our efforts, but it does not teach us that they are caused by our efforts". (9) As with the collision of two balls, mere concomitance does not prove causality. Experience, therefore, is once again mute, and we must consult reason.

Let us begin by assuming that the mind really is the cause of the motion. What this means is that it possesses a moving force that is able to set a body in motion. Now, this cannot involve the communication of motion, since motion is something that does not pertain to minds. And even if it did, it would be a modification and therefore

uncommunicable.

What this involves is that the mind wills and the body moves, the mind continues willing and the body continues moving. Now, to be the true cause of this motion, argues Malebranche, there must be a "necessary connection" between the volition and the movement. Yet it is quite possible that I will to raise my arm and the movement does not occur.

Mais quand on examine l'idée que l'on a de tous les esprits finis, on ne voit point de liaison nécessaire entre leur volonté & le mouvement de quelque corps que ce soit, on voit au contraire qu'il n'y en a point, & qu'il n'y en peut avoir.

(10)

Or il me paroît tres-certain que la volonté des esprits n'est pas capable de mouvoir le plus petit corps qu'il y ait au monde: car il est évident qu'il n'y a point de liaison nécessaire, entre la volonté que nous avons, par exemple, de remuer nôtre bras, & le mouvement de nôtre bras. (11)

Malebranche's second objection borrows a leaf from Arnold Geulincx, and involves his highly questionable notion that we do not cause what we do not know how to cause.

Ego non facio id quod quomodo fiat nescio.

(12)

This argument contends that a true cause must not only bring about the complete physiological process, but must know every detail of this process as well. Naturally, only an omniscient being possesses such knowledge.

Peut-on faire, peut-on même vouloir ce qu'on ne sçait point faire? Peut-on vouloir que les esprits animaux se répandent dans certains muscles, sans sçavoir si on a des esprits & des muscles? On peut vouloir remüer les doigts, parce qu'on voit & qu'on sçait qu'on en a: mais peut-on vouloir pousser des esprits qu'on ne voit point, & qu'on ne connoît point? Peut-on les transporter dans des muscles également inconnus, par les tuyaux des nerfs également invisibles, & choisir promptement & immancablement celui qui répond au doigt, qu'on veut remüer. (13)

The mind cannot will something of which it is ignorant, and since my mind is ignorant of the physiological requirements in the raising of an arm, it cannot will that movement. It cannot, therefore, be considered the true cause of the movement.

Malebranche's final objection is that, if my finite mind were the true cause of the motion in my arm, then the only way it could do this is by creating it, because it cannot communicate the motion in any way. But only the creator of being can create modes of being, so either my mind can create being ex nihilo, or I am not the true cause

of the movement. My will is omnipotent, or I am causally impotent. And while the latter is difficult to accept, the former is simply impossible.

Malebranche's objections to the causal efficacy of finite minds leads naturally to an Occasionalist conclusion. It is only between the will of an infinite being and its effects that we can see a necessary connection, for it is inconceivable that God, an omnipotent being, wills a motion and that motion does not occur.

Thus, when I will to move my arm, God also wills to move it, and since God's will is necessarily efficacious, the arm necessarily moves. My volition is the occasional cause, determining God, the true cause, to produce such and such an effect.

Donc la force qui produit le mouvement de
ton bras vient de Dieu, en conséquence
néanmoins de ta volonté par elle même
inefficace. (14)

This process, like the distribution of motion, is subject to a few simple laws, the laws of mind and body, which state that a change in the modifications of one corresponds to a change in the modifications of the other. Thus, there is a correspondence of their states, but no question of causation between mind and body. And this relationship, like any correspondence, functions in two directions, i.e. from mind to body and also from body to mind.

Consider, for example, what happens when I jab my

finger with a pin. Experience suggests that the pain is "caused" by the jab, or the pin's action on the nerve fibres. Reason, however, tells us that bodies are entirely passive, and possess only a capability of receiving figure and motion.

Consultez l'idée de l'étenduë: & jugez par cette idée qui représente les corps, ou rien ne les représente, s'ils peuvent avoir d'autre propriété que la faculté passive de recevoir diverses figures & divers mouvemens. (15)

They have no active or moving power. Moreover, they cannot share their modifications with the mind, since the modifications of material substance do not pertain to mental substance. Nor could these modifications be communicated, as we have already established. The disturbance in the body on the occasion of the jab cannot be considered the cause of the mental disturbance we experience.

Malebranche presents a further objection by appealing to the Augustinian principle that the inferior cannot have dominion over the superior. The mind is clearly superior to the body, but if our body is capable of producing different sentiments of happiness, pain, pleasure, sadness and so on, then it enjoys a domination over our mind.

Car si le feu ou le soleil peut vous récompenser & vous punir, vous rendre heureux ou malheureux par le plaisir ou la douleur, il faut qu'il soit au-dessus

de vous; il faut qu'il ait puissance sur vous: & vous devez lui être soumis, parce que c'est une loi inviolable que les choses inférieures soient soumises aux supérieures. (16)

It is not the pin-prick which, according to Malebranche, causes the sensation of pain. It acts merely as the occasion for God to produce a disturbance in our mind, according to the general laws of mind and body.

The relationship between mind and body is, therefore, one of 'psycho-physical parallelism'. Just as two parallel lines never touch, but follow each other's path, so mind and body never directly interact. A correspondence exists between their states, but this is due to the intervention and control of a higher authority, God.

In this way, Malebranche's Occasionalism is very similar to Geulincx's "two clocks" and Leibniz's "pre-established harmony," a theory that maintains no causal link between monads, but a correspondence between their states according to a pre-established harmony created by God when He created the Universe.

The union of soul and body, and even the operation of one substance on another, consists only in this perfect mutual agreement, purposely established by the order of the first creation, in virtue of which each substance, following its own laws, agrees with what the others

demand; and the operations of the one
thus follow or accompany the operation
or change of the other. (17)

There is, however, an important difference between the two Occasionalist theories of Malebranche and Geulincx, and Leibniz's pre-established harmony. In Occasionalism, the Universe was not constructed and set to function on its own, for God, as the only true cause, is required at all times to produce effects, or in the case of Geulincx, constantly to synchronize the two clocks. The Occasionalist Universe might be a finely constructed machine, but it requires the constant attention of its creator to keep it running.

Mind and Mind

We have considered the interaction of matter, and the problematic area of mind/body interaction, but there still remains one relationship which must be dealt with - mind acting on mind. Can my mind effect change in itself, or in the mind of another person?

Malebranche begins by considering our own minds, and argues that there are at least some sentiments we have that we do not wish to have.

Ce n'est point non plus mon ame qui
produit en elle ce sentiment de douleur
qui l'afflige; car elle en souffre malgré
elle. (18)

But this, on its own, does not deny the mind causal power, it only establishes that our minds are not the causes

of at least some of our sentiments. What about the sentiments the mind has and wishes to have?

To this Malebranche replies that if we were the true cause of such sentiments, then we would always desire to feel pleasure and to produce it in ourselves.

Si j'étois la cause du plaisir que je
sens, comme je l'aime ce plaisir, j'en
produirois toujours en moi. (19)

But we do not always experience pleasure when we wish to, so there are some cases where the wish for a sentiment occurs without the sentiment resulting. Thus, there is no necessary connection between the willing and the experience of a sentiment, and where there is no necessary connection, there is no causation.

Malebranche also puts forward Geulincx's argument, i.e. a mind cannot do what it does not know how to do. My mind has no clear idea of itself or its sentiments. Nor does it know how to modify itself or produce particular sentiments. It cannot, therefore, be considered the cause of its sentiments.

And if we are unable to produce sentiments in our own minds, then it is inconceivable that we produce them in the minds of other people.

Conclusion

In Malebranche's Occasionalist Universe, nothing happens unless God wills it. Matter has no causal power over either matter or mind, and mind has no causal power over

mind or matter. The only one with such power is God, the one true cause. The created realm is nothing more than a collection of inefficacious beings, depending on God's constant intervention for all aspects of their existence. But this seems to reduce God's creation to a system totally without purpose, and if creatures have no purpose, then that creation does not attest God's wisdom, but detracts from it. If God's power is required to do everything from creating planets to sneezing, then what role does the impotent creature play in such a Universe?

Malebranche's response is that the created realm is essential to the running of this Universe, for without creatures, creation would be, in Craig Walton's words, "only a beautifully structured blueprint". (20)

The key to this is that whenever God acts, He must do so in accordance with His nature, i.e. "d'une manière qui porte le caractère de ses attributs". (21) God is by nature both immutable and wise. His immutability obliges Him to act in a constant and uniform manner, and His infinite wisdom demands that the manifold variety of effects in His creation be produced by a few simple laws. It is more the mark of wisdom to produce the same effects by simple means than by complex means.

With respect to motion, for example, the laws are both few and simple.

sçavoir, que tout mouvement se fasse ou tende à se faire en ligne droite, & que dans le choc les mouvemens se communiquent à proportion, & selon la ligne de leur

pression. (22)

Thus, when Ball A hits Ball B, the distribution of motion is regulated by those general laws, which are simply God acting in a certain way by general volitions. The simplicity and constancy of the laws are, therefore, assured.

Consequently, we are able to avoid the path that led David Hume to scepticism.

Objects have no discoverable connexion together; nor is it from any other principle but custom operating upon the imagination, that we can draw any inference from the appearance of one to the existence of another. (23)

We may induce that the sun will rise tomorrow by simple enumeration, but that assumption is reinforced because we know that the sun's motion is regulated by God's laws, which are simple, and above all constant.

Of course, God is quite able to surprise us by not raising the sun tomorrow, but this would be for Him to act outside His own laws. Such action requires a particular volition, or miracle, and these are employed by God only:

*lorsque l'excellence ou la perfection
qu'une telle volonté produira dans son
ouvrage exprimera davantage ses attributs
que s'il avoit agi à son ordinaire. (24)*

All motion, then, is regulated by a few simple laws. This attests His immutability. But if these laws never

change, then how does one explain the enormous variety of effects witnessed in nature? When a moving automobile strikes a train at rest, the distribution of motion is certainly not the same as when a moving train hits a stationary car.

The answer to this is the wide diversity in the modifications of the bodies in question. In two separate collisions producing two different effects, the laws of motion are the same, and they are constant. It is the modifications of the objects involved, such as figure, mass and so on, that determine God to produce different results. In this way, God is able to produce a variety of effects without any change in His conduct. This attests His wisdom.

The importance of secondary causes is, therefore, twofold. Firstly, without them, God's general laws would not produce effects, for there would be nothing to produce the effects in. As Craig Walton writes, "Laws are not established if they govern nothing". (25)

For example, the general volition that forms the law of the collision of bodies will have no efficacy unless there are bodies to collide. As Malebranche writes in Traité de la Nature et de la Grâce:

Car afin que la cause generale agisse par des loix ou par des volontez generales, & que son action soit réglée, constante & uniforme, il est absolument necessaire qu'il y ait quelque cause *occasionnelle*

*qui détermine l'efficace de ces loix,
& qui serve à les établir. (26)*

Occasional causes, however, allow Him to produce the wide variety of observable effects with a small number of these laws.

Il falloit effectivement une cause occasionnelle à une cause générale, comme je vous le prouverai bien-tôt, afin que cette cause générale agissant toujours d'une manière uniforme & constante, elle pût produire dans son ouvrage par des moyens tres-simples, & des loix générales toujours les mêmes, une infinité d'effets differens. (27)

Secondly, not only do occasional causes allow God to produce certain effects, they actually "determine" Him to do so. For example, a collision between two balls is the occasion for God to produce an effect, but the nature of that effect is determined by the balls themselves, and their modifications. That is why the effects are so different in a collision between a train and a car, depending on which one is in motion.

Likewise, when I will to move my arm, it is my desire to do so that, as occasional cause, determines God to produce the desired movement. As Daisie Radner writes:

That God's general volitions give rise to effects at all depends upon the existence of occasional causes, and what particular

effects God's general volitions give rise to in a given situation depends upon the character of the occasional cause which is present. (28)

R.W. Church, in his A Study in the Philosophy of Malebranche, regarded this determining role as detracting from God's power, for how can God be all powerful if a creature can dictate to Him how to act?

That God should be determined by His creatures contradicts His omnipotence. (29)

This criticism, however, ignores one important point - God chooses to be determined by His creatures in order to run the Universe by general laws. He is not obliged to produce a particular effect on any given occasion, for He has the power to act in complete disregard of His occasional causes if he so wishes. That he chooses not to does not detract from that power or His omnipotence.

The effect that God produces in any occasion, then, is determined by the occasion itself. When two balls collide, the circumstances of the collision determine the effect. When I will to do something, my volition may be inefficacious, but it nevertheless determines God to act in a certain manner. In this way, we enjoy a sort of vicarious power. We may be causally impotent, but we do have some say in the running of God's creation.

But here a problem becomes apparent, the first of several which we will now discuss.

CHAPTER THREE

PROBLEMS OF OCCASIONALISM

The Problem of Precedence and other Problems

If occasional causes determine God to produce a particular effect, then it is essential that God listens to their instruction, or as Antoine Arnauld expresses it:

que Dieu attende ces causes occasionnelles, & ne les prévienne point; c'est-à-dire, que ce ne soit pas Dieu qui détermine ces causes à mettre la condition ensuite de laquelle l'effet se produit; mais que ce soit ces causes qui déterminent la volonté de Dieu à un tel ou tel effet de plusieurs auxquels on doit supposer qu'elle est indéterminée, sans quoi on ne doit pas dire qu'il a agi par des volontés générales.

(1)

In other words, when I desire to move my arm, the desire must be wholly my own, i.e. I must choose of my own accord to will to move it. If God creates the desire within me, then, in effect, He is determining Himself to produce the action. He would be determining the efficacy of His own general volition and thereby remove any distinction between general and particular volitions.

The desire must be my own. This, however, leads to a

problem, for it posits a creative power denied by Occasionalism. If God does not create the desire, then it must be me who does so.

The collision of bodies is no less problematical. Occasionalism demands that bodies can do nothing of their own accord. They cannot, therefore, collide of their own accord. Only God can make them collide, for only He can impart motion to them. But if God creates the collision, then it is He who introduces the conditions of the collision, and once again determines the efficacy of His own general laws, and not the occasional cause at all.

It would appear, then, that the two principal tenets of Occasionalism are at odds. If occasional causes are to determine the efficacy of God's general volitions, and have some role to play in God's creation, then it is false that God does everything as real cause. As R.W. Church concludes in A Study in the Philosophy of Malebranche:

Hence Malebranche must either render superfluous the intervention of God by granting to occasional causes the efficacy proper to causes, or he must maintain that God is the sole cause in every sense, and thus deny to occasional causes all meaning. (2)

The second problem that arises concerns a matter that we have already discussed - the way God's conduct displays the character of His attributes, and particularly whether an Occasionalist Universe attests these attributes.

There is nothing in God's nature that obliged Him to

create the Universe. That He did so was entirely contingent. Once He had decided to do so, however, He was constrained by His nature to create it in a certain way, i.e. attesting His wisdom, benevolence and immutability. For some thinkers, the Universe was a success in this respect. Leibniz considered it the best of all possible worlds, its perfection being "a function of the diversity of its phenomena and the simplicity of its laws". (3)

Bernard Fontenelle, Antoine Arnauld and John Locke, however, came to a quite different conclusion, contending that an Occasionalist system is neither wise nor simple.

For example, to follow a plan in a wise manner is to follow it fully. Malebranche, however, has God act by general volitions which, as Malebranche admits, allow defects to enter into His creation.

*Mais comment auroit-on pû justifier sa
sagesse & sa bonté, voyant tant de monstres
parmi les corps, tant de déreglemens parmi
les esprits, tant de disproportion dans
son action par rapport aux desseins digne
de ses attributs, tant de pluyes sur les
sablons & dans la mer, tant de graces sur
des coeurs endurcis...? (4)*

God does not will such defects, but He does nevertheless allow them, because to remedy them would be to detract from the simplicity of His plan.

*mais Dieu ne multiplie pas ses volontez
pour remédier aux désordres vrais ou
apparens qui sont des suites nécessaires*

des loix naturelles. Dieu ne doit pas corriger ni changer ces loix, quoi qu'elles produisent quelquefois des monstres. Il ne doit pas troubler l'uniformité de sa conduite & la simplicité de ses voyes. (5)

But in allowing such defects, God admits into His creation things that were not originally in His plan. He does not, therefore, execute that plan fully, for as Fontenelle argues in Doutes sur le Système Physique des Causes Occasionnelles of 1686:

Or, une exécution pleine, non-seulement comprend tout ce qui est dans le dessein, mais exclut tout ce qui n'en est point. (6)

Fontenelle's charge against Malebranche is that by having God act by general volitions, He sacrifices the wisdom of His design to the simplicity of its execution, when it should be the reverse.

Il est très-sage, il doit exécuter son dessein pleinement; il est très-simple, il doit l'exécuter simplement: mais il ne peut l'exécuter pleinement et simplement en même temps; sa sagesse et sa simplicité se combattent; il faut qu'il relâche de l'exécution pleine de son dessein, pour donner ce qui est dû à la simplicité. (7)

In his Réflexions sur le Nouveau Système de la Nature et de la Grâce of 1685, Antoine Arnauld concurs.

Car à qui est-ce que le bon sens ne fait pas comprendre, que les voies étant pour l'ouvrage, & non l'ouvrage pour les voies, il est sans doute plus digne d'un agent sage, de produire un ouvrage beaucoup plus parfait par des voies moins simples, qu'un beaucoup moins parfait par des voies plus simples? (8)

John Locke approaches from the opposite tack. In Remarks upon some of Mr Norris's Books of 1693, he attacks the Occasionalist Universe for its very lack of simplicity. If God is obliged by His nature to act in the simplest of ways, then He must never do anything in vain. But if God is the only true cause, then for what purpose has He created such elaborate instruments like the eye and the ear?

For if the perception of colours and sounds depended on nothing but the presence of the object affording an *occasional cause* to God Almighty to exhibit to the mind the ideas of figures, colours, and sounds, all that nice and curious structure of those organs is wholly in vain. (9)

In other words, if it is God that produces the image of the object to my mind, then why has it been necessary for Him to equip me with a complicated organ simply to duplicate that operation? Does this not detract from the simplicity of creation and contradict the spirit of Occam's Razor?

Unfortunately, Locke's attack ignores the relationship

between the occasional cause and the efficient cause, God. It might be God that produces the image in the brain, but He is determined in doing this by the nature of the light entering the eye and the consequent state of the optic nerve. Such organs, therefore, are not unnecessary contrivances, for without them there would be nothing to determine God how to act.

Locke continues later in the Remarks to argue that by reserving all causal power to God alone, at the expense of the created realm, the Occasionalists in fact diminish God's power.

The infinite eternal God is certainly the cause of all things, the fountain of all being and power. But because all being was from him, can there be nothing but God himself? or because all power was originally in him, can there be nothing of it communicated to his creatures? This is to set very narrow bounds to the power of God, and, by pretending to extend it, takes it away. (10)

The analogy he uses recalls Geulincx's theory of the two clocks.

For which (I beseech you, as we can comprehend) is the perfectest power, to make a machine - a watch, for example - that, when the watchmaker has withdrawn his hands, shall go and strike by the fit contrivance

of the parts; or else requires that whenever the hand, by pointing to the hour, minds him of it, he should strike twelve upon the bell? (11)

According to Locke, the Occasionalist Universe is far from a wise and simple construction, for it requires God's constant interference and tinkering if it is to function.

The third problem of Occasionalism is closely linked to what we have already discussed on the matter of our desires acting as occasional causes. When I will to move my arm, my own volition is inefficacious. God, however, heeds my desire and provides the efficient power to move the arm.

The question has already arisen as to what the cause of my desire itself might be. There are two possibilities - myself or God. If it is the former, then it suggests a causal power denied by Occasionalism. If it is the latter, it leads to a Universe in which God seems to determine the efficacy of His own general volitions, rendering all occasional causes superfluous.

But there is a further problem that arises. If God is the true cause of the desire, then what is its occasional cause? This must surely be some previous desire, i.e. a desire to have a desire to do something. And of course the same question then applies itself to that antecedent desire, and so on in an infinite regress. The only way to avoid this is to give humans at least causal power over the original desire for an action. But this is, of course, contrary

to Occasionalism.

The final problem to be considered involves Malebranche's claim that between a true cause and its effects there must exist a "necessary connection". Such a connection exists only between an omnipotent being and its effects, and hence only God can be considered a true cause.

But on reflection, it becomes evident that this argument is not based on any clear notion we have concerning causality and God's will, but rather on our definition of God. We cannot see a necessary connection between God's will and its effects, for we have no idea of God's will. We only assume such a connection must exist because if it did not, God would not be omnipotent.

Car, même si tu crois que Dieu fait ce qu'il veut, ce n'est point que tu vois clairement, qu'il y a une liaison nécessaire entre la volonté de Dieu & les effets, puisque tu ne sçais pas même ce que c'est que la volonté de Dieu. Mais c'est qu'il est évident, que Dieu ne seroit pas tout puissant, si ses volontez absoluës demeuroient inefficaces. (12)

In other words, God's efficacy stems from His definition, and not from any power we know He possesses. As R.W. Church writes:

The conclusion that God alone is the cause thus rests, not on any known necessary connection between His will and any effect

we like to imagine, but rather on the idea of the omnipotence of God. (13)

And the effect of this is, as Beatrice Rome concludes in The Philosophy of Malebranche, "to reduce the whole argument to empty verbalism". (14)

If we reconsider precisely what we know about causality, then we are forced to admit that we have no clear idea of either "power" or "efficacy". Efficacy in God, therefore, is really no more intelligible than efficacy in creatures, since both are mysteries to us. Malebranche is not justified in denying such efficacy to creatures alone. He must restore it to them, or deny it in God as well.

Conclusion

By reserving true causal power to God alone, Malebranche leads himself into serious difficulty on several questions concerning the role of the occasional cause. We have dealt with some of these, but we now arrive at the most complex, and one that is of crucial importance to both the philosopher and the theologian - the question of human freedom and moral responsibility.

It is to this area that our discussion will now turn, in order to determine what freedom, if any, Occasionalism grants to human-beings, and whether this freedom is sufficient for us to be held morally responsible for our actions.

PART TWO

CHAPTER FOUR

MALEBRANCHE'S MORALE

Introduction

For a man to be held responsible for his actions, it is necessary that those actions are truly his, i.e. that they are the result of a free and unconstrained choice on his part. This choice presupposes that at the time of any action, the man is free to do something other than that action. If he is forced to act, then that freedom is absent, and so too is any notion of responsibility for the action. This is fundamental to any moral system.

The question that this discussion will now address is whether, given Occasionalism, man enjoys this basic freedom. To maintain free-will alongside a doctrine that upholds God as the only true cause, resulting in a causally impotent created realm, involves serious problems. If we are not the cause of our actions, then how can we be held responsible for them?

For example, a man suddenly experiences a strong desire to kill his neighbour. God, in accordance with the laws of mind and body, produces the bodily movements and the crime is committed. But who is responsible for it? Naturally, the crucial question is who caused the original desire? If it is God, as Occasionalism demands, then the man was not free in his action, but acted merely as God's instrument of

murder. He could not, therefore, be held responsible for it.

We will now consider how Malebranche tackles problems such as this, and whether he was successful in ensuring a place for free-will within an Occasionalist framework that seems to deny it.

To determine the role that free-will plays within Occasionalism, it is necessary, first of all, to define what Malebranche understands by the term. He begins with what he considers to be the "will".

Volonté

par ce mot de VOLONTE', ou de capacité qu'a
l'ame d'aimer differens biens, je prétens
designer *l'impression ou le mouvement*
naturel, qui nous porte vers le bien
indeterminé & en general. (1)

This impulse, created within all humans by God, is an invincible inclination towards general and undetermined good. It is, in effect, a manifestation of the love that God has for Himself, since God has no other end than Himself in all His operations.

Comme il n'y a proprement qu'un amour en
Dieu, qui est l'amour de lui-même; & que
Dieu ne peut rien aimer que par cet amour,
puisque Dieu ne peut rien aimer que par
rapport à lui: aussi Dieu n'imprime qu'un
amour en nous, qui est l'amour du bien en
general. (2)

As Ginette Dreyfus writes in her essay "La liberté de l'Homme":

La volonté de l'homme, ce n'est pas autre chose que l'amour même dont Dieu s'aime nécessairement et invinciblement, ce n'est pas autre chose que la volonté de Dieu traversant pour ainsi dire la créature. (3)

This impulse would lead ultimately to the supreme good, God, but in the meantime it inclines us toward anything that appears to us to be good. Thus, when we encounter a finite, particular good, we are naturally drawn towards it. But whereas the general impulse is invincible, the attraction toward the finite good is not, for the very reason that the good is finite. Only the supreme good can satisfy our desire. The finite good cannot, and realising this we are encouraged by the general impulse to continue searching.

We are, therefore, capable of resisting the finite good, and of redirecting the impulse towards other finite goods.

L'ame est poussée sans cesse vers le bien en general: elle desire de posseder tous les biens: elle ne veut jamais borner son amour: il n'y a point de bien qui luy paroisse tel, qu'elle refuse d'aimer. Donc lors qu'elle jouit actuellement d'un bien particulier, elle a encore du mouvement pour aller plus loin: elle desire encore autre chose par l'impression

naturelle & invincible que Dieu met en elle; & pour changer son amour ou pour le partager, il suffit de lui présenter un autre bien que celui dont elle jouït, & de lui en faire goûter la douceur. (4)

It is this ability that is fundamental to our freedom.

Ainsi le principe de notre liberté c'est qu'étant faits pour Dieu & unis à lui nous pouvons toujours penser au vrai bien, ou à d'autres biens qu'à ceux auxquels nous pensons actuellement; c'est que nous pouvons toujours suspendre notre consentement & sérieusement examiner si le bien dont nous jouissons est ou n'est pas le vrai bien. (5)

Liberté

Our freedom of choice is ensured by two things.

Firstly:

la force qu'a l'esprit de détourner cette impression vers les objets qui nous plaisent, & faire ainsi que nos inclinations naturelles soient terminées à quelque objet particulier. (6)

And more importantly, the freedom to give or withhold our "consent" to the particular object once we have it under consideration. As Frederick Copleston writes:

In other words, if I once apprehend or think of something as good, my will goes out towards it. But at the same time I am capable of refusing my consent to this movement or impulse in so far as it is directed towards this particular finite good. (7)

It is clear that there must be two levels of "consent" in this process. As Henri Gouhier writes in La Philosophie de Malebranche:

il y a deux temps dans le rôle de la volonté: elle intervient d'abord pour suspendre son consentement, puis pour le donner ou le refuser. (8)

The first role is a "freezing technique", the will suspending any decision on the good whilst the second faculty of the human mind, the understanding, considers it.

C'est, en effet, dans ce temps d'arrêt que l'entendement examine si le bien proposé est ou n'est pas le vrai bien ou si le mouvement qui nous porte vers cet objet s'accorde exactement avec celui qui nous porte vers le vrai bien. (9)

In doing this, the will assumes an attitude of indifference towards the good which is essential to our freedom. Without this power of indifference, the will would continually lead itself into error by assenting to any good it encountered.

With it, however, it is able to suspend all decisions until the true worth of the good has been determined by the understanding. When this has been done:

c'est la volonté qui juge véritablement
en acquiesçant à ce que l'entendement lui
représente et en s'y reposant volontaire-
ment. (10)

This consent can take two forms, as Daisie Radner identifies in Malebranche.

First, one may judge that a thing is a good. To do so would be to accept the thing as worthy of love. An error in this regard would be a moral transgression. Second, one may judge that an object is the supreme good. To do so would be to accept the thing as worthy of love no matter what else has to be sacrificed.

An error in this regard constitutes sin. (11)

The way to avoid such error is to make as much use as possible of our ability to suspend our consent, and never to consent to any good until we are certain of its worth. Malebranche formulates two general rules for doing this; one for the sciences:

*On ne doit jamais donner de consentement
entier, qu'aux propositions qui paroissent
si évidemment vraies, qu'on ne puisse le
leur refuser sans sentir une peine
intérieure & des reproches secrets de*

la raison. (12)

And the other for morals:

*On ne doit jamais aimer absolument un
bien, si l'on peut sans remors ne le
point aimer. (13)*

At this stage two important points regarding human free-will begin to emerge. Firstly, the exercise of freedom involves an exercise of "consent". And secondly, this consent is a judgement on the part of the will, in close relationship with the understanding. We will now consider this relationship in a little more detail.

Entendement et Volonté

Pour connaître le mécanisme de nos actes libres, il faut envisager en détail la double activité de l'entendement ou faculté de connaître et de la volonté ou faculté de choisir. (14)

In Book One, Chapter One of the Recherche, Malebranche considers the nature and properties of the human mind.

L'esprit de l'homme n'étant point material ou étendu, est sans doute une substance simple, indivisible, & sans aucune composition de parties: mais cependant on a coûtume de distinguer en lui deux facultez, sçavoir, l'entendement & la volonté lesquelles il est nécessaire d'expliquer

d'abord, pour attacher à ces deux mots une notion exacte: car il semble que les notions ou les idées, qu'on a de ces deux facultez, ne sont pas assez nettes, ni assez distinctes. (15)

Being obscure, Malebranche proposes to clarify them by comparison with the properties of matter.

La matiere ou l'étenduë renferme en elle deux proprieté ou deux facultez. La premiere faculté est celle de recevoir différentes figures, & la seconde est la capacité d'être mûë. De même l'esprit de l'homme renferme deux facultez; la premiere qui est *l'entendement*, est celle de recevoir plusieurs *idées*, c'est-à-dire, d'appercevoir plusieurs choses; la seconde qui est *la volonté*, est celle de recevoir plusieurs *inclinations*, ou de vouloir différentes choses. (16)

Entendement

The faculty of receiving figures is dealt with first. Extension is able to receive two sorts of figure. "Les unes sont seulement exterieures, comme la rondeur à un morceau de cire: les autres sont interieures, & ce sont celles qui sont propres à toutes les petites parties, dont la cire est composée". (17) The former Malebranche calls "figure", the latter, "configuration".

Likewise, the understanding's perceptions are twofold.

Les premieres que l'on appelle perceptions pures, sont, pour ainsi dire, superficielles à l'ame: elles ne la penetrent & ne la modifient pas sensiblement. Les secondes qu'on appelle sensibles, la penetrent plus ou moins vivement. (18)

At this point two things should be noted. Firstly, whereas the sensible perceptions are modifications of the mind, the pure perceptions are not. This becomes significant later in our discussion. Secondly, and more importantly for the present, the understanding is a purely passive faculty.

de même que la faculté de recevoir différentes figures & différentes configurations dans les corps, est entièrement passive, & ne renferme aucune action: ainsi la faculté de recevoir différentes idées & différentes modifications dans l'esprit, est entièrement passive, & ne renferme aucune action. (19)

It is this passive faculty, or capacity of the human mind to receive ideas and perceive modifications that Malebranche understands by "l'entendement".

Volonté

Malebranche then moves on to consider the nature and properties of the second faculty, the will. Again, he begins with a comparison with extended matter.

L'autre faculté de la matiere, c'est
qu'elle est capable de recevoir plusieurs
mouvemens; & l'autre faculté de l'ame,
c'est qu'elle est capable de recevoir
plusieurs *inclinations*. (20)

The cause of both motion and inclination is the same,
God.

De même que l'Auteur de la nature est la
cause universelle de tous les *mouvemens*,
qui se trouvent dans le matiere; c'est
aussi luy qui est la cause generale de
toutes les *inclinations* naturelles qui
se trouvent dans les esprits. (21)

Moreover, just as an object set in motion will proceed in a straight line, unless it encounters another object that disturbs it, so the inclinations of the soul describe a straight line towards God, unless they are redirected by finite goods.

This is where the comparison ends, however, for there is one aspect of the will that differs markedly from matter.

Car la matiere est toute sans action:
elle n'a aucune force pour arrêter son
mouvement, ni pour le déterminer & le
détourner d'un côté plutôt que d'un autre...

Mais il n'en est pas de même de la volonté, on peut dire en un sens qu'elle est agissante, parce que nôtre ame peut déterminer diversement l'inclination ou l'impression que Dieu lui donne. Car quoi qu'elle ne puisse pas arrêter cette impression, elle peut en un sens la détourner du côté qu'il lui plaît. (22)

The will, then, is an active faculty, and it is this ability to direct the general impulse towards particular goods that forms the basis of our freedom. As Malebranche writes:

par celui de LIBERTE, je n'entens autre chose que *la force qu'a l'esprit de détourner cette impression vers les objets qui nous plaisent, & faire ainsi que nos inclinations naturelles soient terminées à quelque objet particulier.* (23)

This power does operate under certain restrictions, however, for we can only direct ourselves towards goods that we are aware of.

Mais il faut bien remarquer, que l'esprit considéré comme poussé vers le bien en general, ne peut déterminer son mouvement vers un bien particulier, si le même esprit considéré comme capable d'idées, n'a la connoissance de ce bien particulier. Je veux dire, pour me servir des termes

ordinaires, que la volonté est une puissance aveugle, qui ne peut se porter qu'aux choses que l'entendement lui représente. (24)

It is clear, then, that the two faculties of blind volition and passive understanding share a rather unusual partnership, much like a blind man pushing a paraplegic around in a wheelchair. Whilst the paraplegic has no motive power he can, however, see the road ahead and the direction it follows. The blind man cannot, but he can walk and move the wheelchair as well, following the directions and advice of his partner.

Conclusion

Considered in isolation, Malebranche's notion of free-will is quite straightforward. We are drawn inevitably towards goods, but at the same time are capable of refusing our consent to any particular good, and redirecting ourselves towards other goods.

When we recall, however, that this process is to take place within a causally impotent creature, things are not quite so simple.

Our discussion will now consider what happens when this notion of free-will is placed in an Occasionalist context, particularly the problems that arise and whether they are serious enough to render Occasionalism and human freedom incompatible.

CHAPTER FIVE

FREEDOM AND OCCASIONALISM

Introduction

As we have seen, the giving or withholding of consent is central to Malebranche's notion of freedom. To be free, therefore, it is essential that the consent is also free, i.e., that we are entirely free to give or withhold it. This, however, leads to problems when placed within an Occasionalist framework. Occasionalism is primarily concerned with causation. One might ask, then, as Antoine Arnauld did in Réflexions, what the cause of the consent itself might be. Again, two possibilities arise - God or ourselves.

A convincing notion of freedom seems to demand the latter, for we must be entirely free to give or withhold the consent. If we are not, and are determined in some way, then we cannot be held responsible for any resulting choice or action. But if we are the cause of the consent, then there is something for which God is not the cause, which is contrary to Occasionalism.

If, on the other hand, God is the cause, as Occasionalism demands, then it is difficult to argue for human freedom, when the determinant of our actions is created within us by a higher authority.

Naturally, the problem of compatibility is far from being as simple as that. For example, it is quite feasible within Occasionalism that both God and ourselves are the cause of the consent - God as true cause, we as occasional

causes determining God to produce the consent within us. This does, however, lead to its own problems, which we will consider presently.

But in the meantime, it underlines two points crucial to this discussion. Firstly, we cannot begin to understand Malebranche's notion of freedom without a clear understanding of what it is to consent. Secondly, if humans are to be free, it is necessary that their consent also be free. Consequently, the question we must now answer is this - What precisely is consent, and where does it come from, ourselves or God?

Consent

It will be recalled from Chapter Four, that when we encounter a particular good, we are naturally drawn towards it by the invincible impulse implanted in all of us by God.

This inclination toward the particular good is not itself invincible, however, for we are able to suspend our movement towards it, examine the good and then decide on its relative worth.

Consent, then, is based on an examination, or judgement, of the good, made by the active will according to information it receives from the passive understanding.

The question that inevitably arises here is, from where does the understanding receive the information in the first place? It cannot produce it itself, for it is a purely passive faculty, and can only receive ideas from some other source. The question is where?

Malebranche considers the various possibilities in the Recherche, Book Three. He begins by defining what is meant by "idea".

Je croi que tout le monde tombe d'accord, que nous n'appercevons point les objets qui sont hors de nous par eux-mêmes... & l'objet immédiat de nôtre esprit, lorsqu'il voit le Soleil par exemple, n'est pas le Soleil, mais quelque chose qui est intime-ment unie à nôtre ame; & c'est ce que j'appelle *idée*. Ainsi par ce mot *idée*, je n'entends ici autre chose, que ce qui est l'objet immédiat, ou le plus proche de l'esprit, quand il apperçoit quelque objet. (1)

He then adds that everything we perceive belongs to one of two sorts of perceptions - "ou elles sont dans l'ame, ou elles sont hors de l'ame". (2) The perceptions inside the soul are its various modifications, such as "ses propres sensations, ses imaginations, ses pures intellections, ou simplement ses conceptions, ses passions même, & ses inclinations naturelles". (3) And as they are "in" the soul, we have no need of ideas to perceive them.

elles ne sont que l'ame même d'une telle ou telle façon; de même que la rondeur réelle de quelque corps, & son mouvement ne sont que ce corps figuré, & transporté d'une telle ou telle façon. (4)

But it is the other sort of perception that interests us here, i.e. those things outside the soul and particularly material things, for we can perceive them only by means of ideas. But material things are extended, and ideas are unextended, so how do these ideas enter our mind?

Malebranche posits five possibilities.

que les idées que nous avons des corps,
& de tous les autres objets que nous n'appercevons point par eux-mêmes, viennent de ces mêmes corps, ou de ces objets: ou bien que nôtre ame ait la puissance de produire ces idées: ou que Dieu les ait produites avec elle en la créant, ou qu'il les produise toutes les fois qu'on pense à quelque objet: ou que l'ame ait en elle-même toutes les perfections qu'elle voit dans ces corps: ou enfin qu'elle soit unie avec un être tout parfait, & qui renferme généralement toutes les perfections intelligibles, ou toutes les idées des êtres créés.

(5)

He then dismisses each one in turn (6), except the last, and here we encounter Malebranche's other celebrated doctrine, the Vision in God.

Vision in God

God has within Himself "les idées de tous les êtres qu'il a créés, puisqu'autrement il n'auroit pas pû les produire". (7)

Moreover, because of His omnipresence, God is in close union with our minds.

de sorte qu'on peut dire qu'il est le lieu des esprits, de même que les espaces sont en un sens le lieu des corps. (8)

From these two points the Vision in God is formulated. Our minds are able to see all the works of God in God, "supposé que Dieu veuille bien lui découvrir ce qu'il y a dans lui qui les represente". (9) In other words, when we perceive an idea of an external object, that idea does not come from the object itself. Rather, because we share in the Universal Reason, the idea we perceive is God's own idea of the object. And since God has the ideas of all things within Him, then we have access to an infinity of information.

il est certain que tous les êtres sont presens à nôtre esprit; & il semble que tous les êtres ne puissent être presens à nôtre esprit; que parce que Dieu lui est present, c'est-à-dire, celui qui renferme toutes choses dans la simplicité de son être. (10)

Moreover, the ideas we receive are very accurate.

la connoissance que nous en avons est tres-parfaite...nous ne pouvons desirer d'avoir une idée plus distincte & plus féconde de l'étenduë, des figures & des mouvemens que celle que Dieu nous en donne. (11)

This is because the ideas we have of objects are God's own ideas, i.e. the objects' archetypes, and are, therefore, perfect.

But this raises a problem. If ideas are so perfect, then why is it we sometimes see them in an obscure way? Malebranche's answer is that what characterizes an idea as clear or confused is its apprehension, and not the idea, *per se*. As Daisie Radner writes:

Clearness and distinctness, obscureness and confusedness, characterize our perceptions of ideas rather than the ideas themselves. (12)

The way that we can ensure a clear and distinct apprehension of an idea is through "attention", which Malebranche describes as a "priere naturelle" which the will makes to the Universal Reason in order to receive enlightenment from it.

L'homme participe à la souveraine Raison & lui est uni, & la verité se decouvre à lui à proportion qu'il s'applique à elle, & qu'il la prie. Or le desir de l'ame est une priere naturelle qui est toujours exaucée; car c'est une loi naturelle que les idées soient d'autant plus presentes à l'esprit, que la volonté les desire avec plus d'ardeur. (13)

Thus, the more we desire to think of something, the clearer our idea of that thing will be. The desire is itself inefficacious, however, just as the desire to raise my

arm is inefficacious. The true cause of enlightenment is God. The effort of attention is the occasional cause of enlightenment.

In terms of our consent, then, it is clear that God plays a very important role in the whole process. He inclines us toward the good in general, presents a particular good and modifies our mind with sensations of it, and when we reserve our decision and request information on that good by the natural prayer of attention, He provides this information as well, in accordance with the laws of the union of the soul with the Sovereign Reason.

Is there room left for freedom in a scheme such as this, in which consent, the very essence of freedom, is influenced by information coming directly from God?

Power of Veto

The answer to this question depends on one very important point. In making a judgement on a particular good are we able to disregard, or veto, the information we receive from God? If not, the consequences are quite clear. If we are obliged to follow God's information, then it is God who determines our judgement and, therefore, consent. There would be only one decision to make, and this would be dictated by God. There would be no room for freedom.

For example, a man encounters a peach and eats it. Savouring its taste and texture, he recognizes it as a good. But being uncertain as to the extent of its good, or whether it is the supreme good, he requests information on it from

the Universal Reason. God responds by informing him that it is merely a fruit, and that it is right down near the bottom of the Order of lovable objects, i.e. that he should not love the peach as the supreme good.

Now, a consistent notion of freedom demands that the man be able to disregard this information. Otherwise, he is determined by what God advises. Religion, too, demands this ability.

In any Christian philosophy, man must have the freedom to sin. Sin, in Malebranche's system, is loving a particular good as if it were the supreme good, i.e. a consent to the wrong good. If that consent is determined by a higher authority, then the man cannot be held responsible for it, for he is merely a puppet. Responsibility for the consent, and therefore the sin, would lie with the higher authority, in this case God, which is of course completely unacceptable to the theologian.

In short, Malebranche must grant to us this power to disregard God's advice, even though it is an ability that will inevitably lead us into error and sin. To be responsible for sin, we must be free to sin.

Where, then, does this power of veto lie? Since judgement is a cooperation of the understanding and the will, it must be with one of these faculties. It cannot be the understanding, however, for it is a purely passive faculty and can only receive ideas, not actively reject them.

This power must lie with the active will. But this leads to several problems, for the will is a blind faculty.

la volonté est une puissance aveugle,
 qui ne peut se porter qu'aux choses que
 l'entendement lui représente. (14)

It is unable to make its own examination of the good and it cannot create its own ideas, for this would constitute a creative power denied by Occasionalism. Does this mean that if the will chooses to disregard the ideas provided by God, it isolates itself from its only source of information, and becomes a truly blind faculty, making its judgements in complete darkness?

The key to this lies with the distinction made earlier between perceptions inside the soul and those of things external to the soul which require ideas to represent them. There are three kinds of human perception - pure understanding, sensation and imagination. The ideas from God pertain to the former, but the soul can still receive information on the particular good from the latter two.

It is sensation that is of primary importance here, i.e. the production by God of sensations in our mind in the presence of material objects. Imagination is merely the faculty of producing images of these objects in their absence.

Thus, when the man encounters the peach, his mind is affected by modifications representing the shape, colour and feel of the peach. When he eats it, God produces the sensation of sweetness, and so on. All of these modifications are produced by God, according to the laws of mind and body.

The senses, therefore, do act as sources of information,

so if the will disregards the ideas supplied to the pure understanding, it can still make its judgement based on some knowledge of the particular good.

This knowledge, however, is deceptive, for the occasional causes of the sensations are not the external objects themselves, but the disturbances they produce in our bodies. The senses, as Malebranche warns in Book One, Chapter Five of the Recherche, should never be treated as accurate informers.

Nous devons observer exactement cette
règle. *De ne juger jamais par les sens
de ce que les choses sont en elles-mêmes,
mais seulement du rapport qu'elles ont
avec nôtre corps.* (15)

Before the Fall, the First Man's senses functioned as they were supposed to, as advisors of what was necessary for the conservation of his body and as a warning system guarding against danger and damage. As absolute master over his body, Adam had complete control of his senses, and could even shut them off if he so wished, once they had performed their advisory role.

After he had sinned, however, this dominion was reversed.

Ses sens & ses passions se révoltèrent
contre lui, ils n'obéïrent plus à ses
ordres, & ils le rendirent, comme nous,
esclave de toutes les choses sensibles. (16)

It is by accepting the evidence of the senses as indicative of the nature of the external bodies that we are led into error. To blame the senses themselves for this error is unfair though, for their nature has not changed since before the Fall. What has changed is the extent to which we allow ourselves to be distracted by them. Our senses still faithfully inform us of the objects we encounter. We deceive ourselves, and lead ourselves into error and sin, when we make precipitous judgements on this information.

The antidote for this disorder is twofold - Firstly, never make over-hasty judgements based on what the senses tell us, and keep in mind that they are incapable of indicating the nature of bodies in themselves. And secondly, make a greater effort to heed the information that God provides to us by virtue of our union with the Sovereign Reason.

The will, then, is capable of disregarding God's advice. To do so, however, leads us into a realm of confusion and inevitable error. And while it is desirable to avoid this error, it is, nevertheless, essential we are able to fall into it.

To avoid it, we must make greater effort to listen to God's advice, and to follow it whenever we are judging the worth of a particular good. It is important to note that by heeding this advice, we in no way detract from our freedom, for it is one thing to be obliged to do action "A", and quite another to have a choice of actions and subsequently to choose action "A", even though the outcome is the same. We might often follow God's advice, but this is not to negate our

freedom, so long as we have the choice not to follow it.

In short, to avoid error it is essential that we follow God's advice. But to be free, it is essential that we are able not to follow it. Both philosophy and theology demand this. Error and sin are to be avoided, but it must be up to us to avoid them. And to be able to avoid them, we must be free to commit them in the first place. Such is the very essence of Christian moral teaching.

With the power of veto, the Vision in God can be defended against the charge that it gives God control over our consent. With our ability to disregard the information He provides, God's role is that of an advisor only.

The doctrine does lead to other problems, however, which must be dealt with here.

The Meno Paradox

According to the Vision in God, "attention" is a natural prayer that we make to the Sovereign Reason, in order to be enlightened by it.

c'est une loi naturelle que les idées
soient d'autant plus presentes à l'esprit,
que la volonté les desire avec plus
d'ardeur. (17)

An idea is provided to my mind by God on the occasion of my desiring to be enlightened by it, i.e. I desire to think of an object or concept and God responds by providing the idea. But to desire to think of an object, say a tree, requires that I already have the idea of a tree in my mind,

for I cannot desire something of which I am ignorant. Moreover, as desiring is a function of the will, and as the will can only be directed to things that the understanding presents to it, then again, the will can only desire what the mind is already aware of. But if the mind is already aware of an idea, then there is no reason to desire to have the idea. Malebranche is, therefore, led right into the Meno paradox.

Malebranche's answer to this problem was to introduce degrees of awareness of an idea.

De plus il est nécessaire qu'en tout tems nous ayons actuellement dans nous-mêmes les idées de toutes choses, puisqu'en tout tems nous pouvons vouloir penser à toutes choses: ce que nous ne pourrions pas, si nous ne les appercevions déjà confusément, c'est-à-dire si un nombre infini d'idées n'étoit present à nôtre esprit; car enfin on ne peut pas vouloir penser à des objets dont on n'a aucune idée. (18)

At all times we perceive an infinite number of ideas, albeit confusedly. Thus, when we desire to be enlightened by an idea, we are merely requesting a clarification of an obscure idea we already have. And the more effort of attention we make, the clearer the idea we receive. This is, in effect, a version of the famous Platonic argument for Recollection, which maintains that ignorance is not a complete lack of knowledge, but only "forgetfulness" on our part.

Malebranche's own theory of "indistinct perception", put forward in the Recherche, presupposes that for each material object, there is a corresponding particular idea in the Sovereign Reason. Therefore, for each separate object, a separate idea is needed to represent it.

In the Éclaircissements of a year later, however, Malebranche has changed his tune, denying the correspondence between particular objects and particular ideas in God.

Il ne faut pas s'imaginer que le monde intelligible ait un tel rapport avec le monde material & sensible, qu'il y ait par exemple un soleil, un cheval, un arbre intelligible destiné à nous représenter le soleil, un cheval & un arbre; & que tous ceux qui voyent le soleil, voyent nécessairement ce prétendu soleil intelligible. (19)

Instead of a separate idea representing each separate object, the Sovereign Reason contains a single idea of extension, from which the nature of all bodies can be derived. Malebranche termed this single idea "intelligible extension". Thus, when I see a horse, it is a portion of the intelligible extension revealing itself to my mind.

Malebranche, himself, did not consider this new theory a shift in his view of the Vision in God. Rather, it was merely a more detailed explanation of what was put forward in the Recherche, i.e. the Recherche was concerned with explaining that we see all things in God, and the Éclaircissement with explaining how this is done.

Several of his critics were not easily convinced of this though. Antoine Arnauld maintains, in his Des vraies et des fausses idées, that Malebranche has presented two quite different theories, the latter being a retraction of the former. He also contends that the idea of intelligible extension is contrary to the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine, who both support the notion that God contains a particular idea for each separate thing in His creation.

Several later writers support Arnauld's criticism. Francisque Bouillier, in Histoire de la Philosophie Cartésienne of 1854, agrees that the Recherche and the Éclaircissements propose two quite different theories - one containing an infinity of separate ideas, the other supporting one single idea.

R.W. Church concurs with Bouillier.

In the first version of the theory of the Vision in God, ideas are regarded as being intrinsically individuated and self-identical. The Tenth *Éclaircissement* explains that the difficulty of understanding how the idea of the sun could become larger and smaller as does the appearance of the sun itself, forced Malebranche to reconsider his original view of ideas. Hence, we now find him abandoning the conception of a plurality of self-identical ideas, and asserting instead that what we see in God is an intelligible extension. (20)

Malebranche was able to extricate the Vision in God from the problems of the Meno paradox, but in doing so he exposed himself to the attack that he had shifted ground over the doctrine. Whether this is true, or whether the *Éclaircissement* really was an elucidation of the original theory, as he claimed, is difficult to determine and beyond the scope of this thesis. But the problems surrounding the Vision in God are important to this discussion, for the doctrine is central to the question of consent, and consent is central to the question of freedom. Moreover, these problems are essentially problems of Occasionalism. The Vision in God is not a separate doctrine, but Occasionalism extended onto the epistemological plane. As with the motion in my arm, God is also the true cause of my mind's enlightenment by ideas. And as my desire to move acts as the occasional cause determining God to produce the motion, so my desire to know is the occasional cause of my knowledge.

When Malebranche defends these doctrines of Occasionalism and Vision in God against the charge that it is God who creates the consent within us, it must be kept in mind that our freedom depends on this consent being wholly our own. If God causes it then we are not free. But as he elaborates the notion of continuous creation, that charge becomes even more acute.

Création Continué

It will be recalled from Chapter One that continuous creation was a Cartesian notion put forward in the *Médita-*

tions. It involves the view that the conservation of an object over a period of time is really its continuous re-creation. It is a view that Malebranche himself accepts without question.

Un corps existe, parce que Dieu veut qu'il soit: il continuë d'être par ce que Dieu continuë de vouloir qu'il soit: & si Dieu cessoit seulement de vouloir que ce corps fût, dès ce moment il ne seroit plus. (21)

The same power that created a body ex nihilo is required to keep that body in creation. This power is God's alone. Conservation, therefore, is nothing other than God's continuous creation of the body at successive moments. But to create an object ex nihilo, or to re-create it at successive moments, is also to create it in such and such a state, i.e. in motion, square, round and so on.

In effect, God's continuous creation ensures not only an object's existence, per se, but also all its determinate states, i.e. its substance and all its modifications. This includes human beings.

With respect to the human soul, then, God is directly responsible for both its creation and all its modifications at any given moment. Thus, it is God who creates us standing when we stand, and thinking when we think.

quand nous parlons ou marchons, quand nous pensons & voulons, Dieu nous fait tels que nous sommes, il nous crée parlans,

marchans, pensans, voulans. (22)

Is it also God who creates us consenting when we consent?

If so, then human freedom is illusory, for if the consent is created within us at a given moment, then there is nothing and no-one that can change it.

Nothing can make a substance exist in a certain manner if its creator does not produce it in that manner. (23)

In short, our behaviour with respect to particular goods would be determined by the state in which God decided to re-create us at that moment. Moreover, if God creates all acts of consent, and sin is consent to the wrong good, then we have returned to the charge that God is the author of sin. Consequently, the notion of continuous creation leads to the same unpalatable philosophical and theological conclusions that we have already encountered.

The key to this problem once again lies with the nature of the consent, particularly whether it can be regarded as a modification of the human soul. It is on this question that Malebranche builds his defence.

Malebranche's approach to the problem is to maintain that consent to an inclination is not, unlike the inclination itself, a modification. This defence employs two arguments.

The first once again uses the analogy of matter. The inclination toward a good is like motion in an object, i.e. a modification requiring a force to produce it. This force

is God, or more particularly, "l'efficace créatrice de la volonté de Dieu". (24)

Consent, however, is like "rest" or "repose" in an object - a condition of stasis, requiring no force to produce it. When we consent to a good, we merely "rest" with it. Accordingly, to sin is to rest with a particular good, when we should carry on towards God. It contains nothing positive or real.

Clearly, the defence that Malebranche is putting forward is the traditional Augustinian reply that sin is a non-being, an absence of action rather than a positive action itself. As Thomas Lennon writes in Philosophical Commentary:

The soul gives itself no new modifications when it consents: when it consents to the good, it does only what God does in it; when it consents to false goods, it does nothing. (25)

But it is very doubtful whether Malebranche reaches the shelter of the Augustinian defence, for several problems immediately arise.

Firstly, in Malebranche's view, to consent is to do nothing, i.e. it denotes an absence of any positive action. It can be argued though, that consent actually is a positive action. If, by doing nothing, I fail to do some other action that has been prescribed (viz. carry on towards God), then I am "doing something other" than that prescribed action. In this sense, consent can be construed as positive.

As long as there is a prescribed action set down, then to "do anything other" than that action is to do "something", even if it is to do nothing.

It is the analogy of matter, however, that leads Malebranche into more serious difficulties. According to this analogy, the inclination to good equals motion in a body, and consent equals rest or repose. But rest in a body is merely the absence of motion. In no way can the same be said of consent, which cannot be the absence of the inclination. The inclination is constant and invincible; it cannot be absent.

If this line of argument is taken one step further, Malebranche's analogy, and indeed his whole defence, breaks down even more. Since the inclination to the good in general is constant and invincible, then by consenting to a particular good, the soul is not merely "resting" with that good, but "resisting" the general impulse that impels it further. Consent, then, is not to do nothing, as Malebranche claims, because one cannot rest in the constant stream of the general impulse. To remain with a good is to resist that impulse, and resistance requires an opposing force.

Consider a man crossing a swiftly flowing river. If the general inclination to the good is the current, then to remain in one place in the river, requires the man to resist the current, to brace himself against it. If he does nothing, or "rests", as Malebranche would have him do, he would be swept away.

Consequently, consent requires a force to produce it, for it is a positive action. It is not merely the absence

of something else.

Does this also mean that consent is a modification of our soul? To determine this, it is necessary to consider the meaning of the word "modification". This is, in fact, what Malebranche does in the second argument for his defence.

In Réflexions sur le prémotion physique, Malebranche defines a modification as:

ce qui ne peut changer, qu'il n'y ait
quelque changement réel ou physic dans la
substance, dont elle est la modalité. (26)

As its name suggests, a modification brings about some change in its substance, it "modifies" it. Malebranche's argument is that when a soul consents to its inclination it does not bring about any real change in itself. Is this true?

Firstly, before we encounter a particular good, our inclination is towards God. After the encounter, our inclination is towards the particular good. It is this inclination that we consent to or not, as the case may be. By consenting, however, we must resist the general inclination, and this resistance is in our soul. This is one change our consent engenders.

Secondly, consent is a judgement, and our judgements do affect our later perceptions and beliefs. For example, by judging that the colour red is proper to the tomato, i.e. belongs in the tomato, I am consenting to an illusion that will seriously alter my later perception of the material world. This is another change my consent brings about in my mind.

The same is true with the memory. Judgements which are later found to be erroneous will be remembered. For example, if I consent to a peach as the supreme good, and consequently realise the extent of my error, my behaviour towards peaches, or anything resembling them will be considerably changed.

In short, my consents do modify my mind, by bringing about new states of mind. They do not produce them as such, for only God can do this. They do, however, act as occasional causes, making a difference to what God produces as real cause, much like any other modification.

In conclusion, then, it can be strongly argued that consent is a modification of the soul. The problem of divine control of consent is, therefore, exacerbated, for only the creator of being can create modes of being, and the only one with such a creative power is God.

Desire - the Key to Consent

There is one possibility left to Malebranche. It is quite possible that, although it is God who creates the consent within us, it is we who, as occasional causes, determine Him to do so. In this case responsibility for the consent would be ours, as would sin, moral action, and any other consequence of the consent. But this would depend on one crucial condition - that the desire to consent were ours. If it were not, then both freedom and responsibility are removed from us.

Our original question, therefore, has taken one step back - Who is the cause of the desire to consent? Once again,

there are two possibilities, ourselves or God.

If it is the former, as freedom and moral responsibility demand, then there is something for which God is not the cause, which is contrary to Occasionalism. If, however, it is God, then there is no place for freedom within Occasionalism. God creates the desire within me. This desire then determines God to act in a particular way. Consequently, God is determining Himself to produce effects. Humans are reduced to the mere instruments of these effects, having no say in them at all.

Moreover, if God does cause the desire, then presumably He does so by a general volition. But as we found in Chapter Three, this leads us to enquire what is the occasional cause that determines the efficacy of this general volition? That must be some antecedent desire, for which the same questions can be asked in an infinite regress.

CONCLUSION

It would appear that the two areas of Malebranche's philosophy central to this thesis are at odds. Human freedom demands certain conditions that Occasionalism necessarily excludes. Malebranche is, therefore, faced with a dilemma. He would like to reserve a place for freedom within his doctrine, but cannot. Either he must grant us freedom and relinquish Occasionalism, or uphold his doctrine and reduce us all to puppets. There is no compromise.

This fundamental incompatibility of freedom and Occasionalism is not immediately apparent in Malebranche's philosophy. By an interpretation of freedom based on "consent", Malebranche succeeds, to an extent, in reconciling the two areas. By maintaining that consent is not a modification of the human soul, he is able to reserve a place for freedom beyond the scope of God's direct control. Consent, he argues, is something we do, and choose to do, using our own initiative. It is this ability that forms the basis of our freedom.

The arguments in support of this view, however, are weak, and the analogies faulty. It can be strongly argued that consents make a considerable difference to our present and later perceptions of the goods we encounter, "modifying" our soul much like any other modification. As modifications, they can have only one cause, God, as both Occasionalism and "continuous creation" demand. Consequently, the charge reasserts itself, that freedom is not freedom if it is

dictated by God.

From here, there is only one defence open to Malebranche. By conceding divine causation of consent, he can still maintain human control over it, if he can prove that the human desire to consent acts as its occasional cause, determining God to produce the consent within us. This, however, depends on one essential condition - that we have absolute control over the desire. It is with respect to this that the fundamental incompatibility of freedom and Occasionalism becomes apparent.

The only way we can have absolute control over the desire is if we are its real cause. We cannot be its occasional cause, for this presupposes some antecedent desire, leading us directly into an infinite regress. We either have this real causal power or we do not.

Consequently, there are only two possibilities open to Malebranche. Either we are the true cause of our desires, or God is. Freedom demands the former and Occasionalism demands the latter. There is no compromise that will satisfy both.

It is the human desire that holds the key to the entire question of freedom and moral responsibility. If I experience the desire to kill my neighbour, that desire must be my own. If God causes it within me, then He is initiating a chain of determinants over which I have no control, and for which I share no responsibility. In short, freedom and responsibility both demand that we are, at least, the real cause of our own desires.

The Error of Occasionalism

The doctrine of Occasionalism took seed in the Islamic desire to vindicate the absolute omnipotence of Allah and the dependence of His created realm. The Augustinian inspiration that motivated Malebranche's own Occasionalist doctrine was the same.

But between the motive and the mature doctrine a change seems to have occurred. The former is primarily concerned with establishing God's omnipotence, the latter with proving our impotence. The two are not the same thing, and it is this shift in emphasis that is the unnecessary and fundamental flaw of Occasionalism.

To ensure the absolute omnipotence of God, it is not necessary to establish the complete impotence of creatures. Whether we have causal power or not makes no difference to the extent of God's power, since His power is infinite and absolute. Omnipotence does not demand that God is the only being with power, but rather that He is the only being with absolute power.

Likewise, dependence on God does not mean impotence. The more a doctrine makes us dependent on Him, the more attractive it will be to the Christian philosopher, but only to a point. By extending that dependence to its logical conclusion, human impotence, the Occasionalists introduce a set of problems and unresolved questions that risk denying the very attributes of God they wish to extol. Nothing in Christian teaching demands our impotence. Indeed, is it not more worthy of a wise and benevolent God to create man with a modicum of His own power? We have been created in His own

image, after all. With such power, all the problems of human freedom and moral responsibility that concern this thesis are avoided.

By setting out to prove the impotence of creatures, however, Malebranche is led into a sea of troubles. Each problem that arises must be resolved within the Occasionalist framework, which then leads to other problems, and then others, in a spiral of complexities. Consequently, by the time the doctrine has been fully expounded, it has led to a view of reality so rarified and so far removed from common sense as to be absurd. Even David Hume was alarmed by the doctrine.

so extraordinary, and so remote from
common life and experience. We are got
into fairy land, long ere we have reached
the last steps of our theory. (1)

Several other British commentators were more direct with their language. John Sergeant described Malebranche as a:

very Ingenious and Eloquent Person, who
has a peculiar Talent of talking Nonsense
as prettily and plausibly as any Man I
ever read. (2)

Despite Malebranche's attempts to reconcile them, Occasionalism and freedom are entirely incompatible. Either we are causally impotent or we are free, but not both. To maintain both is to embrace the fundamental contradiction characteristic of Malebranche's doctrine. As Daisie Radner

expresses it:

Man is totally dependent on God, but
not quite. (3)

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